

Unsettled Identity Negotiations: The Armenian Diaspora in Krasnodar Krai

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Abstract

This chapter, based on ethnographic fieldwork, explores cosmopolitanism through the prism of unifying and dividing processes and their impact on the identity of young Armenians living within the Armenian community in southern Russia's Krasnodar krai. The empirical research presented shows the ways in which cosmopolitan practices allow young Armenians to draw selectively on a variety of discursive cultural meanings, enabling them to combine sameness and difference into their everyday lives. Sameness is understood in terms of belonging to the Armenian diaspora – a discourse of unity that is encouraged by Armenian voluntary organizations and the Armenian Apostolic Church. Conversely, difference is the result of diverse narratives of migration, different places of origin and different dialects of Armenian language which all serve to form a hierarchy of power within the Armenian diaspora in Krasnodar krai.

Introduction

For centuries, Armenian history and culture has been characterised by various waves of migration, some forced, some voluntary. In particular, the expulsion of Armenians from their traditional homelands in eastern Turkey in 1915¹ resulted in large-scale dispersion and, consequently, the formation of the Armenian *spyurk* (diaspora) as a social category (Safran 1991), that differ from the previous notion of *gahtavair* (cf. Panossian 2006). A further distinction was made during Soviet times between Armenians belonging to internal and external diaspora – those from the *blizhnoe zarubiezhe* (the “near abroad”), Armenian communities in Russia and other former Soviet republics) and those from the *dalnoe zarubiezhe* (“far away”, Armenian communities in Europe, America and the Middle East) (cf. Shahnazarian 2013). In turn, the establishment of an independent Republic of Armenia in

¹ Many Armenians were killed during this period although the exact number is strongly contested. The most commonly accepted number of Armenian fatalities is around 1.5million people – roughly 60 per cent of Turkey's Armenian population at that time (Hoffman 2006: 71). The events of 1915 are often cited as the first state ‘genocide’ of the twentieth century.

1991 has underscored the division between those living there (*hayastansty*) and those living abroad (cf. Darieva 2012). Thus, despite being formally united as a single nation, Armenians are internally diverse in terms of their culture and identity, exacerbated by the fact that of the approximately seven million Armenians in the world (Kurkchiyan & Herzig 2005: 2) at least one half are assumed to live outside the homeland (Pattie 2005: 126).²

Since Armenians started moving to Russia in the eighteenth century, they have struggled to renegotiate their identity and their relationship with Armenia, while at the same time establishing themselves in their new country of settlement. During Soviet times, most Armenians living outside the Armenian SSR³ were able to preserve many elements of their distinctive culture, despite the state authorities' attempts to eradicate national differences. Nevertheless, they became highly influenced by the concepts of "people's friendship" (*druzhiba narodov*) and the 'Soviet people' (*sovetskiĭ narod*) (Oussatcheva 2001). As a result, many Armenians found it hard to think of themselves as members of a diaspora, considering themselves citizens of a single homeland – the USSR (Libardian 1999). Such terms as the Russian language's "*diaspora*" or the Armenian "*spyurk*" were hardly used in everyday parlance (Lourie 1999). This, however, all changed when the Soviet Union collapsed. Armenia became an independent country, ethnic conflicts emerged in the South Caucasus, and a fresh wave of Armenian migrants came to Russia.

This chapter explores the unifying and dividing processes within the contemporary Armenian community in Krasnodar krai, in southern Russia. It discusses the complex problems which arise when numerous waves of Armenian migrants, differentiated by the time and departure point of their migration, meet in one place. The aim of this chapter is to show that, despite attempts at unification by local Armenian voluntary associations and the Armenian Apostolic Church, there are major differences between the "new" and "old" Armenian diaspora. These differences are reinforced by the political discourse in Krasnodar krai, which portrays migration as a problem for the region.

This chapter draws on data gathered during on-going ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Krasnodar since 2006, including participant observation, in-depth interviews and press

² Reliable, recent figures are difficult to obtain, so this data is based on estimates.

³ Despite the fact that many Armenians lived outside their ethnic republic, the Armenian SSR was the most ethnically homogenous republic in the USSR (Suny 2005).

analysis.⁴ The chapter begins by providing an overview of local migration politics as well as Armenian migration to Krasnodar krai, followed by a discussion of the concepts of diaspora, identity and cosmopolitanism. It then proceeds to examine the history and development of Armenian voluntary associations and the Armenian Apostolic Church as unifying institutions. The final part of this chapter discusses the dynamic ways in which identity politics are currently being negotiated within the local Armenian diaspora.

Armenian Migration and Identity Politics in Krasnodar Krai⁵

As a result of large-scale migration flows, Krasnodar krai, has become one of Russia's most ethnically diverse regions. According to the 2002 population census, Krasnodar krai has a population of around five million, with Russians constituting the majority (86.56 per cent or 4,436,272 people).⁶ Armenians have a long and established history in Krasnodar krai dating back to the eighteenth century and are currently one of the largest ethnic minorities in the krai, officially comprising 5.36 per cent (274,566) of the region's total population (Krasnodarskii kraevoi komitet gosudarstvennoi statistiki 2005). Armenians arrived in Krasnodar krai via several waves of migration. The two most significant being the wave that followed the Armenian genocide between 1915 and 1920 with approximately 30,000 Armenians fleeing to the region (Ter-Sarkisants 1995) and the wave of Armenian migrants following the ethnic conflict in the Caucasus in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The latter included Armenians fleeing Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh (1988-1994), refugees from the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict (1992-1994), and forced re-settlers from Chechnya (1994-1996 and 1999-2001).

When large numbers of migrants and refugees (not only Armenians) came to the region following these and other ethnic conflicts, Krasnodar krai's authorities faced major difficulties in developing an effective migration regime. As a political reaction to these waves

⁴ Part of the research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (2006-2008) and by the Centre for East European Language Based Area Studies (CEELBAS), where the author conducted research as CEELBAS Postdoctoral Research Fellow on Migration and Diasporic Citizenship (2009-2011) at University College London. Modified versions of several parts of this chapter have been published previously (Ziemer 2009, 2010, 2011a, 2011b).

⁵ Parts of this section have been previously published in Ziemer (2011a).

⁶ Source: Krasnodarskiĭ kraevoi komitet gosudarstvennoi statistiki (2005). Data from the most recent population census in 2011 was still inaccessible at the time of writing.

of migrants, which generally were perceived as a security threat and a threat to a 'healthy' ethnic balance, the authorities turned to institutionalised discrimination against ethnic minorities. In this way, regardless of when a given group of Armenians settled in Krasnodar krai, most find themselves affected by the issue of recent migration.

On the other hand, coexisting with this negative approach to migration is an official discourse at the regional and federal levels which attempts to promote cultural diversity, and some ethnic voluntary organisations are financially supported by the public purse. For example, the krai's regional budget sets aside two million roubles annually to support various projects for the Shapsughs – a sub-tribe of the Western Adyghs – and the federal authorities' have provided support in various forms for other indigenous groupings in Russia (Osipov 2004: 14). Such an approach is universal in Russia, but it is particularly strong in the official politics of Krasnodar krai.⁷

Noteworthy here is that the ethnic composition of Krasnodar krai has not changed significantly since 1989. According to the 1989 and 2002 censuses the ethnic Russian population was, respectively, 86.71 per cent and 86.56 per cent of the total population (Krasnodarskiĭ kraevoi komitet gosudarstvennoi statistiki 2005). This contradicts Krasnodar krai's public discourse, with its emphasis on the decline of the ethnic Russian population. Instead, census data confirms that since 1989 the ethnic composition of the krai's population has only changed slightly, due in part to the arrival of Slavic re-settlers (*pereselentsy*) to the region from other parts of Russia (Sokolov-Mitrich 2007:10). For example, in 2001 approximately 90 per cent of all newcomers were Russian citizens, and 82 per cent were ethnic Russians (Popov 2005: 52-53). A similar opinion was expressed by Zhurbin (2005), that according to statistics on 'ethnic' migration, Russians predominate in migration numbers.⁸ This opinion is often contradicted by other sources, for example, Rakachev and Rakacheva (2003), who claim that Armenian migrants comprise the largest group based on ethnicity. Following the official anti-migration discourse, experts in the field predominantly discuss migration in terms of illegal migration as a threat to the region's stability and

⁷ The discourse of cultural diversity has grown significantly in the past few years in order to create a positive image of the region in preparation for the Winter Olympics in Sochi.

⁸ Interview with M.S. Zhurbin on 25 August 2005, conducted by R. Kuznetsova, at the Centre for Pontic and Caucasian Studies (Krasnodar), as part of a mini-project on migration conducted for the RIME Project 2004-2006, University of Warwick.

disturbing the region's demographic balance, ignoring the fact that this is an internal migration of Russian citizens that prevails.

The proportion of Armenians in Russia in general, and in Krasnodar krai in particular, has nonetheless increased in recent years and this is often portrayed negatively in the press. For example: '*At present several million Armenians live in Russia, but only about 15,000 Russians live in Armenia...*' (Begletsov 2004: 1-2). According to official Russian statistics every fourth Armenian in Russia lives in Krasnodar krai, and as Alexandr Tkachev, the governor of Krasnodar krai, claims: '*there are approximately one million Armenians in the krai*'.⁹ In addition, the official regional discourse often contains different opinions regarding the exact number of Armenians living in Krasnodar Krai. In contrast to governor Tkachev, who claims that one million Armenians reside in the region, Kuznetsov (2002), an expert on Armenians in living in Krasnodar Krai, suggests that there are no more than 350,000. As stated earlier, however, according to the population census from 2002, only 274,566 Armenians are recorded as living in this part of Russia (Krasnodarskiĭ kraevoi komitet gosudarstvennoĭ statistiki 2005). These differences in opinion on the number of Armenians in Krasnodar krai raise doubts about the reliability of the census data, which is viewed as capturing only a part of the actual population.¹⁰ Thus, there is the widespread assumption that there are many more (unregistered) Armenians than these figures suggest.

Diasporic Identities in Cosmopolitan Perspective

Social science literature is rife with debate concerning what diaspora is and how it should be defined. The concept of diaspora has been used to write about displaced people, migrants, and transnational peoples. While some scholars, like King and Melvin (1999/2000: 10), define diaspora as an "ethnic community divided by states," others, like Lavie and

⁹ *Armiane Kubani* film by Artem Erkanian (2005).

¹⁰ The questionable accuracy of the 2002 population census can be explained by several shortcomings in the data. First, whereas previous Soviet censuses were carried out in a controlled state and compliance with the census was mandatory, the 2002 population census was conducted during unstable times, where the population's distrust had increased, which led to difficulties in conducting the census (Heleniak 2003: 431). Second, there is the problem of ethnic self-identification, especially with regard to people from ethnically mixed origins (cf. Oswald 2000),

Swedenburg (1996: 14), describe diaspora in terms of a “doubled relationship or dual loyalty that migrants, exiles and refugees have – including their connections to the space they currently occupy and their continuing involvement with ‘back home.’” In addition to focusing on the home-host relationship, other scholars define diaspora as a type of social form (Wahlbeck 2002: 229), and emphasize the transnational character of diasporas and diasporic activities which transcend state boundaries (Kelly 2011: 445).

Many scholars also understand diaspora as a category of analysis which questions individual and collective notions of home and homeland, and the impact these notions have on identity for those born and raised outside their “traditional” homeland (Brah 1996). Some members of a diaspora recognize their homeland as “a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination, in the sense that it is the place of ‘origin’” (Brah 1996: 192). In contrast, for other members of diasporas, their home, the place where they actually live, can appear as “the lived experience of a locality” (Brah 1996, Ziemer 2009, 2011b). The dichotomy of the “mythic place of origin” and home as daily sensory experience is important not only for any migrant’s understanding of previous and current homes, but also for subsequent generations raised outside traditional ethnic homelands, for whom ‘home’ may continue to be multiply situated (Brah 1996: 197).

This present study takes a processual view of diasporas in that it considers the ways in which a particular social and political reality is constructed. In this respect, diasporic identity is also understood as a form of practice. Such an approach incorporates the diverse processes of identification. It draws attention to the plurality of identity narratives of a diaspora and the processes through which they are selected, practiced, and embodied in everyday life. Taking diaspora as practice emphasizes the cosmopolitan which tends to embrace the partial, syncretized and ever-changing aspects of identity (Breckenridge et al. 2002). A cosmopolitan perspective on diaspora also moves beyond local/national limitations. An individual can construct a self-identity through selective cosmopolitanism, moving between home cultures and ‘alien cultures’, thereby creating various definitions of home (Hannerz 1990: 240-248). While categorically defining cosmopolitanism may be “an unc cosmopolitan thing to do” (Breckenridge et al. 2002: 1), cosmopolitanism can be described as “ways of living at home abroad or abroad at home – ways of inhabiting multiple places at once, of being different

beings simultaneously” (Breckenridge et al. 2002: 11). In short, cosmopolitanism is understood as a means by which diasporic people draw selectively on a variety of discursive cultural meanings, and therefore are able to combine sameness and difference in their everyday lives, thus creating unity through diversity.

Unifying Institutions: Armenian Ethnic Voluntary Associations and the Armenian Apostolic Church

The Armenian Apostolic Church and Armenian voluntary associations have played a major role in the formation of an Armenian diasporic community in Krasnodar krai. Although many Armenians voluntarily migrated to this part of Russia before 1915, Armenians who came to the region immediately after 1915 were refugees and had survived traumatic experiences of loss and suffering. Thus, their desire to return home one day and keep the memory of the homeland alive was particularly strong. Not surprisingly, this group engaged in activities which concentrated on preserving, revitalizing, and reproducing memories of the old original homeland to form a sense of community and belonging. Initially, this took place through the formation of religious and educational institutions.

Armenian voluntary associations first appeared in southern Russia at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1889, for example, a branch of the *Armyanskoe blagotvoritel'noe obshchestvo na Kavkaze* (Armenian Charitable Society in the Caucasus, ACC), originally founded in 1881 in Tbilisi, was opened in the Krasnodar region (Simonyan 2003: 33). By 1882, members of the ACC in Tbilisi had already established links to Armenians in Krasnodar krai by making short visits to Armavir and Ekaterinodar to collect donations. Moreover, national parties, such as “*Hnchak*” or “*Dashnaktsutyun*” started to operate in the North-West Caucasus, leading to a political mobilization of the local Armenian diaspora (Karapetyan 2006). Noteworthy here is that during the initial period of Armenian migration to the Kuban region,¹¹ the Russian government introduced laws which stimulated Armenian diasporic activities and the migration process itself (Khachaturyan 2000). The settlers received many privileges, such as the right to organize their own system of self-government within their ethnic settlements (Simonyan 2003: 162).

¹¹ Krasnodar krai is also known as Kuban region named after the Kuban River flowing through the region.

Yet, when the number of Armenian migrants continued to increase beyond the control of the Russian government, and when Armenian national parties gained more political influence, the Russian government started to restrict earlier privileges which it had granted to Armenian migrants. Ultimately, this led to the closure of Armenian schools in the Caucasus in 1896, as well as Armenian voluntary associations in 1898. As the Armenian Apostolic Church often served as a “mediator” for the Kuban Armenian diaspora with the Armenian diaspora in other regions and countries, as well as with Armenia itself, the Tsarist administration and later the Soviet government perceived this role negatively; since it was considered the main obstacle to the policy of Russification. The Soviet government thus introduced measures to also weaken the influence of the Church, such as removing the Armenian clergy from the education process in national schools and confiscating Church property in 1903.

From 1907 onwards, however, various Armenian voluntary associations were re-opened or established anew in Krasnodar krai, including the first two ethnic voluntary women’s associations, the “Armenian Charitable Society for Women” (*Armyanskoe zhenskoe blagotvoritel’noe obshchestvo*), in Maikop, and the “Armenian Charitable Society for Ladies” (*Armyanskoe damskoe blagotvoritel’noe obshchestvo*) in Ekaterinodar (Simonyan 2003:34). The activities of these voluntary associations were primarily educational, as well as helping orphans and children from poor families. Membership fees and cultural fundraising events paid for these activities. The Armenian voluntary associations not only focused on the Armenian community, but generally served the well-being of the whole region.

After the 1917 Revolution and the subsequent establishment of the Soviet Union in December 1922, the Armenian Church was heavily repressed and Armenian political parties were banned. For thirty-two years, there was no Armenian church in Krasnodar krai and only two Armenian churches were active in the whole of the North-West Caucasus. Furthermore, Soviet policies negatively affected all aspects of Armenian diasporic life, although Armenian newspapers and educational institutions functioned in some periods. The situation changed from the end of the 1980s onwards, when, as part of the process of a national-cultural renaissance in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet period, numerous Armenian voluntary associations were established anew. This process – an “unexpected outcome” of the political changes of this period (Burawoy & Verdery 1999) – was further strengthened in the Armenian case by the Karabakh war (Lourie 1999). Yet this revival was also the outcome of

the national and local political discourse in Krasnodar krai to support ethnic voluntary associations, despite a negative approach to migration.

Nowadays, there are many different Armenian associations throughout Krasnodar krai. While some have only a few members, others have several hundred. Some are funded and supported by the local government, while others are privately financed.¹² For example, the Armenian cultural magazine, *Khachkar* is fully funded by Krasnodar-based Armenian businessman Andreï Amosov. In an interview with the author,¹³ Amosov identified the revival and maintenance of Armenian traditions as well as raising awareness of Armenian cultural values amongst young Armenians in Krasnodar as major aims of his cultural magazine. He complained that many second and third generation Armenians are often unable to speak Armenian and appreciate the *Khachkar* magazine in the same way as the older generations.

Voluntary associations aim to meet the cultural, social and political needs of Armenians living in Krasnodar krai. Some, like *Armyanskaia Pashkovskaya Obshchina* (Armenian Pashkovskiï Association,¹⁴ APO), offer opportunities in all three areas, while others, like the *Obshchestvo Armyanskoï Kul'tury i Miloserdiya im. M. Mashtotsa* (M. Mashtots – Association of Armenian Culture and Charity), are more focused on cultural and social activities and are state-funded. It is important to note that most state-funded ethnic associations are set up in order to promote the official government discourse of ethnic diversity in the region and to limit diasporic political activities. Many Armenian associations, whether privately or state-funded, are involved in organizing concerts, lectures and other cultural events. For example, in 2006, the APO together with the Armenian Church in Krasnodar organized a series of concerts in which famous artists from Armenia performed in Krasnodar, such as the popular *duduk* player Djivan Gasparyan. Staging traditional Armenian religious festivals at Christmas and Easter, national celebrations such as Armenia's Day of Independence and the annual commemoration of the Armenian genocide are also of central

¹² It is noteworthy that in Russia as a whole, many well-known, wealthy and influential Armenian businessmen, such as Danil Khachaturov, Ruben Vardanyan, Samvel Karapetyan and Levon Harutyunyan engage in activities to foster Armenian culture in Russia, and to strengthen links with the homeland.

¹³ The interview was conducted in Krasnodar in July 2010.

¹⁴ *Pashkovskiï raïon* (district), where the main premises of the APO are located, is part of Krasnodar.

importance. In addition, on a daily basis, most of these organizations offer Armenian language, dance and singing classes.

In the political sphere, many Armenian associations are actively engaged in supporting Armenia's petitions for official recognition of the Armenian genocide and in lobbying for migrants' rights to vote in Armenia's elections. Engaging with homeland politics is a top priority on their agenda. An example can be seen in the visit to Krasnodar made by the President of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic, Bako Sahakyan, in February 2010. As part of his visit, Sahakyan not only met with the heads of Armenian voluntary associations, but he also visited an Armenian Sunday school on the premises of the Armenian Church where he socialized with teachers and students, before making a public speech to the greater Armenian community.

By these and other activities Armenian voluntary associations not only contribute to creating stronger links between the diaspora and the homeland, but also try to bridge the gap between recent Armenian migrants and members of the older diaspora.

Internal Hierarchies and Divisions

Armenian voluntary associations attempt to represent the interests of all Armenians, including recent Armenian migrants and local "old" Armenian diaspora. However, complex cultural, generational, social and structural differences between migrant cohorts have resulted in a particular relationship of power among various Armenian sub-groups, based on symbolic articulations of cultural specificities mainly relating to country of origin and diverse migration experiences. Thus, despite the unifying attempts of Armenian organizations and the Armenian Apostolic Church, a noticeable feature of the local Armenian diaspora in Krasnodar krai is a powerful set of boundaries within the local Armenian community. This internal diversity is also well-known to and emphasized by the regional authorities as a political tool to justify their discriminatory practices. On several occasions, Aleksandr Tkachev, the regional governor, has relied on these internal divisions in his speeches to rationalize his policies:

"Those who live legally here, Armenians, Georgians and other nationalities – these are our people, our fellow-countrymen (*zemlyaki*), these are Kuban people and we don't make any distinctions. What I am talking about is illegal migrants, those who came to

Kuban in the last two, three or five years, and I know that there are already tensions with those who came from Armenia (Tkachev 2004).¹⁵”

This line of argument is also held by Nikolaï Gromov, the ataman of the Kuban Cossacks,¹⁶ who suggests:

“When speaking about Armenians, we clearly distinguish between those who are our local Armenians – they are “ours” – and those new ones, who have come in the last 10 to 15 years to the region and whom even local Armenians don’t accept (Gromov 2005).¹⁷”

The above extracts highlight the ways in which local politicians reinforce divisions between “old” and “new” Armenians in public discourse. These divisions are also acknowledged and practiced within the Armenian diaspora itself. In this respect, it is useful to consider Barth’s (1969) argument that it is the process of inter-group contact that generates cultural meanings through a boundary dividing “us” from “them.” Gupta and Ferguson (2002) link this approach to an understanding of power relations. For them, constructing difference is a means by which to establish a hierarchy of power.

Unlike pre-perestroika Armenian migrants, who are well integrated into local society, many of those who have arrived from 1988 onwards face not only general challenges in the Russian host society; they also experience distrust and, sometimes, rejection from members of their own diasporic community. A substantial contributing factor to such a rejection can be found in the negative media portrayal of migrants in terms of illegality and crime (cf. Roman

¹⁵ Tkachev cited in *Armyane Kubani* documentary by Artem Erkanyan (2005).

¹⁶ In Tsarist Russia, Cossacks were a special militarised segment of society but they disappeared from public view in the Soviet period. In Krasnodar krai, the *Kubanskiĭ Kazachiĭ Klub* was founded in 1989, and in 1990, the Cossack movement branch, *Kubanskaya Rada* was established (Boeck 1998, pp. 633 – 657). Its members have managed to manoeuvre themselves into positions in the regional administration. The Cossack leaders often hold the position of vice-chairman in the administration at local government, city and regional levels. It is not clear how much real influence is attached to these positions, but it serves the symbolic function of forging a connection between the Cossacks and the Krasnodar territory (Toje 2006: 1069).

¹⁷ This quotation is taken from Artem Erkanyan’s documentary “*Armyane Kubani*” (2005).

2002). Hence, some representatives of the old Armenian diaspora in Krasnodar krai consider newcomers to be criminals whose activity negatively influences the attitudes of the Russian population and authorities towards everyone of South Caucasian or North Caucasian descent, as a 27 year-old female local Armenian tells us:

“Even though I belong to the ‘old’ Armenian diaspora, I don’t think that these newcomers are necessarily criminals. I wouldn’t even say the ‘old’ Armenians reject them – on the contrary, most of the ‘old’ ones try to help, like the *obshchina* [*Armyanskaya Pashkovskaya Obshchina*, APO], for example. Even if they are rejected by officials, they can still find a decent job here without becoming a criminal. In my opinion, they just don’t want to adapt. The thing is you can’t do here what you used to do at home. They have to behave in the same way as we do in Krasnodar. What also doesn’t help is that both old and new are quite arrogant sometimes. The new ones think and pretend everything is better in Armenia or wherever they come from and the old ones just look down on them because of their clothes and so on.”

Although this research participant maintains that she does not reject newcomers, she expresses a certain discontent caused by the way new migrants behave in the host society. One could argue that, with such views and stereotypes, local Armenians themselves reinforce the political discourse which portrays any new migrants as a disturbance to society in Krasnodar krai. In a sense, such an understanding is deeply rooted in the recent history and economy of the host country. While the government tends to portray the arrival of new migrants as disturbing the ethnic balance in the region, another likely influencing factor is that most migrants heading to Russia from Armenia tend to be temporary, rural and unskilled migrants (Gevorkyan et al. 2006). Furthermore, because of the newcomers’ different behaviour, they are viewed as damaging the image and reputation of the long-established and well-integrated local Armenian community in the eyes of the host society. As the next female, a 27-year-old representative of the “old” diaspora, describes:

“Those [Armenians] from Baku came to Krasnodar 20 years ago. They already have everything here [...] they have lived in Krasnodar for quite a long time now [...]. they have their circle of friends and their status in society. Well, and when these new ones arrived,

especially from Armenia in the 1990s, we could feel the impact immediately. We felt it, us ‘local’ Armenians, that they were from Yerevan. But for Russians, we all look the same. For Russians, it doesn’t matter where Armenians come from, they are still Armenians.”

In addition to those boundaries created as a result of different arrival dates and different degrees of adaptation on the part of migrants, a major internal boundary between Armenians stems from a sense of community based on place of origin (*zemlyachestvo*). Such identity is particularly strong among newcomers and today one can discern several groups divided according to this principle. First, there are the Azerbaijani Armenians who came to the region in the late 1980s during the Karabakh conflict. This group may be subdivided into those Armenians who came from the capital city of Baku and its industrial satellite towns, such as Sumgait, and those who came from the city of Kirovabad and nearby villages, including *Goranboy raion* (or the *Shahumyan* region in Armenian). Second, there are the Karabakh Armenians (*Artsakh* Armenians), and third, the Georgian Armenians from Tbilisi, Javakhk and Abkhazia.¹⁸ The Abkhazian group, it should be noted, mostly consists of Hamshen Armenians (Simonyan 2003: 145).¹⁹ Finally, there are those Armenians from Armenia who left the country after the earthquake in 1988 and as a result of worsening socio-economic conditions in the 1990s.

In this context, it should be noted that much has been made of the basic cultural differences between “Eastern” and “Western” Armenians, including their different linguistic dialects (cf. Shahnazarian 2013). While it is true that most post-Soviet Armenians speak Eastern Armenian and most established diasporic Armenians speak Western Armenian, Iranian Armenians, for example, who have never been part of the Soviet Union, still speak Eastern Armenian. In Krasnodar krai the existence of this linguistic diversity and local dialects creates some barriers to integration. In interviews, research participants would often deny that these differences are important, yet on the everyday level they do have a certain

¹⁸ They came to Krasnodar krai in the 1990s primarily due to the harsh socio-economic conditions in Georgia at that time.

¹⁹ Hamshen Armenians were originally Christian Armenians but over the centuries evolved into a distinct ethnic group converted to Islam .

influence, as the next extract from an interview with a 24-year-old local Armenian woman shows:

“No, it doesn’t matter to me whether the person is an Azerbaijani Armenian [...]. Well, first of all, I can hardly understand their language [she means the different dialect]. Well, if it’s not your native language, then it’s hard to understand, especially those Baku Armenians, it’s really terrible. I just can’t understand anything they want. Well, in general, I have acquaintances and friends who are Baku Armenians and we get on. I can’t really say anything bad.”

From this interview excerpt, one can see that as the interviewee emphasizes the “cultural” diversity between her and her friends, she is indirectly talking about the internal hierarchies of the Armenian diaspora, in the sense that she knows about internal divisions, while denying that she would act in a way to perpetuate them. In the context of her remarks, it should perhaps be acknowledged that what she is saying should not be separated from her “audience” (Brown 1998). It illustrates that, for someone “perceived” to be an outsider (in this case, the interviewer) these internal cultural divisions are portrayed as only minor, having hardly any significance for the overall unity of the Armenian diaspora in Krasnodar. However, and as the subsequent discussion illustrates, there is evidence to suggest the contrary.

Along with language differences, there are also other visible cultural differences, which create hierarchical distinctions. In this “cultural hierarchy”, Armenians who fled Baku and other Azerbaijani cities, or those who are from Nagorno Karabakh, are ranked lowest and are often looked down upon by the old diaspora in Krasnodar, but also by more recent Yerevan Armenians in Krasnodar. This is partly due to the fact that they are thought to have lived far too close to a Muslim society during Soviet times, adopting some of their customs and traditions. Such stigmatizing differentiations ignore the cosmopolitan nature of Baku in Soviet times (Grant 2010) and are largely made as a result of Armenia’s enduring resistance to Muslim conquest and the traumatic experience of the Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey in 1915. Both Baku and Nagorno Karabakh Armenians are often perceived as “false Christians,” owing to secularizing processes during Soviet times, as well as to their past,

having lived in predominantly Muslim milieu. For example, in the summer of 2009, during an Armenian cultural gathering, the author overheard a priest from the Armenian Church in Krasnodar calling Nagorno Karabakh Armenians “*bezbozhniki*” (“non-believers”) in a heated argument over church attendance.

While Nagorno Karabakh Armenians seem to be placed at the bottom of this internal hierarchy and differentiations within the Armenian diaspora in Krasnodar, at the top of this hierarchy, there are Armenians from Erevan. They perceive themselves as ‘proper’ Armenians, as they come from the “cultural centre” of the Armenian nation. As a reaction, other Armenians often describe them as being arrogant and conceited. One 26-year old female local Armenian, for example, maintains that Armenians from Erevan come to Krasnodar krai and other parts of Russia thinking they have a “genuine” Armenian culture. This research participant describes these cultural differences by referring to one Armenian from Erevan:

“...Well, and then there is E. [a priest] in the church – he is such a Erevan Armenian. Well, from head to toe he is a Erevan Armenian, there’s nothing in this world better than him [...]. You know his regal attitude: ‘We are Erevan Armenians, we are the world’s proper Armenians.’ Well, they refer to all other kinds of Armenians as if they are below them...”

Another 23-year-old female research participant, whose parents originally came from Baku, also talks about these cultural differences and hierarchies amongst Armenians, using more than one example:

“There are Armenians from Erevan, you know, ‘*erevansti*’ [uses her fingers to signal inverted commas]. I really can’t get on with them. I don’t understand them, and never will understand them. They think completely differently from me [...]. Well, and then there is A. [interviewee’s friend], she is from Tbilisi. You know, in Georgia. Well, in Soviet times this didn’t matter and we were all the same, but now even she considers herself different from me. Do you understand how complicated this all is, where you are from? And people [Armenians] often judge you accordingly, as each of these Armenian groups has a particular image. Baku Armenians are considered to be very funny, easy-going and love to go out. They’re good-hearted people, and love talking and socializing. Erevan Armenians are

considered snobbish, very regal, even in comparison to Armenians from Leninakan [Gyumri], who kind of have a funny accent. You see, there are so many jokes about Erevan Armenians and their snobbishness.”

It is worth noting that this perceived “snobbish” attitude of Erevan Armenians could also be understood in terms of a feeling of inferiority. As indicated in the previous section, not only are the poverty levels very high in Armenia, but Armenians in Armenia (including those living in Erevan), are also heavily dependent on diaspora remittances. Armenia receives approximately \$2 billion in remittances every year from the Russian-Armenian diaspora, which is an average of 20 per cent of Armenia’s gross domestic product (GDP) (Khachaturian 2008). Hence, presenting themselves to the Armenian diasporic world and the host society as “proper” Armenians can be seen as a counterbalance against their economically disadvantaged position.

Interestingly enough, these hierarchies and cultural distinctions are recognized both by the members of the “old” Armenian diaspora, and by ‘new’ immigrants as well. As a 25-year-old male research participant, who moved from Armenia to Krasnodar in 2001 admitted:

“Well, there are differences – well, if you look at me, I am an Armenian from Armenia and I have that character. Well, I was born in Armenia and grew up there. Well, everything is different there and we have different ways of thinking.”

Finally, if we take into account visible features, such as differences in clothing, hairstyles and behavior, the cultural distinctions between Armenian sub-groups become even more obvious and further impose internal divisions and hierarchies. In the next quotation, a female Baku Armenian talks about these differences, although she also implies that not all members of the Armenian diaspora have the cultural competence to recognize them:

“I’d like to say that I do have stereotypes and I do feel the differences. For instance, if you show me a Baku Armenian or an Armenian from Erevan or some Armenian from another place [...] I can tell [from where he/she is] straight away from his or her behavior, from his or her talk and so on. Well, generally, this is quite difficult. You have to grow up with it. For example, my parents can easily distinguish and they taught me how to distinguish, but M.

[interviewee's friend] can't tell the difference. I can, for example, even tell the difference by people's clothes. A couple of years ago this was particularly noticeable. I remember that when Armenians came to Krasnodar from Azerbaijani towns like Kirovabad, they all loved to wear leather waistcoats [*kozhanye zhiletki*]. And this is where the stereotype comes from – you see, Armenians who like to wear leather waistcoats are Armenians from Kirovabad! Also, I can differentiate according to their hairstyles and tell what place an Armenian come from. That is very easy, especially regarding those from Erevan. Generally, I can easily see when Armenians are from Armenia. Well, I can hear by their language where they are from, and by their behaviour, naturally.”

Noteworthy about this quote is that this research participant told the author during the interview that she calls herself “Russified” even though she was one of the Armenians who came from Azerbaijan to Krasnodar in late 1980s, when she was a baby. From the way she describes these differences, one can see she sets herself apart from these Armenians because she is well integrated in Krasnodar society and in fact would rather under-emphasize her Armenianness. This summarizes well the above discussion as it highlights the conflicting, as well as hierarchizing processes that are lived out by members of the Armenian diaspora.

Concluding Remarks

In the case of the Armenians living in Krasnodar krai, cosmopolitanism operates within the diaspora through the acknowledgement of diversity and unity. Unity is expressed by emphasizing belonging to one diasporic community. Being a member of this diasporic community is characterized by sharing pan-Armenian narratives of migration which have formed the diaspora. In the context of Krasnodar krai, these are the Armenian ethnic voluntary associations and the Armenian Apostolic Church which seek to create unity by celebrating a pan-Armenian culture to which every Armenian can belong. Yet, part of being Armenian in Krasnodar krai is the experience of diversity within the Armenian diaspora. Diverse narratives of migration, different places of origin, and different dialects of the Armenian language have all contributed to a hierarchy of power within one diaspora in a specific location, where members of an older established diaspora are challenged by new migrants. In this way, one can argue that Armenians in Krasnodar combine strong ethnic affiliations with an attitude that recognizes cultural diversity within one people in their everyday lives. At the same time, within this milieu members of the ‘old’ diaspora negotiate

and at times reinforce these divisions in order to maintain their position in Russian society, despite efforts to build up a unified community.

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